

PERSPECTIVISM AND MULTINATURALISM IN INDIGENOUS AMERICA ^{* 1}

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The relativity of space and time has been construed as though it were dependent on the choice of the observer. It is perfectly legitimate to bring in the observer, if he facilitates explanations. But it is the observer's body that we want, and not his mind.

A.N. Whitehead

Ainsi, la réciprocité de perspectives où j'ai vu le caractère propre de la pensée mythique peut-elle revendiquer un domaine d'application beaucoup plus vaste.

C. Lévi-Strauss

The subject of this essay is that aspect of Amerindian thought which reveals its "perspectival quality" (Århem 1993) or "perspectival relativity" (Gray 1996): the conception, common to many peoples of the continent, according to which the world is inhabited by different sorts of subjects or persons, human and non-human, which apprehend reality from distinct points of view. The presuppositions and consequences of this idea are irreducible (as Lima 1995:425-38 has shown) to our current notion of relativism, which at first it seems to call to mind. In fact, they lie athwart, so to speak, the opposition between relativism and universalism. The resistance of Amerindian perspectivism to the terms of our epistemological debate casts suspicion on the robustness and transportability of the ontological partitions which feed it. In particular, as many anthropologists have already concluded (albeit for different reasons), the classic distinction between Nature and Culture cannot be used to describe domains internal to non-Western cosmologies, without first undergoing a rigorous ethnographic critique.

In the present case, such a critique requires the disassociation and redistribution of the predicates subsumed within the two paradigmatic sets that traditionally oppose one another under the headings of Nature and Culture: universal and particular, objective and subjective, physical and moral, fact and value, the

given and the constructed, necessity and spontaneity, immanence and transcendence, body and spirit, animality and humanity, among many more. This reshuffling of our conceptual cards leads me to suggest the term *multinaturalism* to designate one of the contrasting features of Amerindian thought in relation to modern 'multiculturalist' cosmologies. The latter notion rests on the mutual implication of the unity of nature and the multiplicity of cultures – the former guaranteed by the objective universality of bodies and substance, the latter generated by the subjective particularity of spirit and meaning.² Contrary to this, the Amerindian concept would suppose the unity of spirit and the diversity of bodies. Culture or the subject would here take the form of the universal; nature or the object the form of the particular.

This inversion, perhaps too symmetrical to be more than speculative, must be developed into a phenomenologically rich interpretation of Amerindian cosmological notions, capable of determining the constitutive conditions of the contexts which might be called 'nature' and 'culture'. Thus we must reconstitute these notions only to then desubstantiate them, since in Amerindian thought the categories of Nature and Culture are not only different in content but also do not possess the same status as their Western analogues; they do not indicate domains of being but rather relational configurations, mobile perspectives, in sum – points of view.

Clearly then, I think that the nature/culture distinction needs to be criticised, but not in order to conclude that such a thing does not exist (there are already too many things that do not exist). The "above all methodological value" that Lévi-Strauss (1962b:327) came to attribute to them is here understood as above all comparative. The flourishing industry of criticisms of the Westernizing character of all dualism has called for the abandonment of our dichotomising intellectual heritage. The problem is very real, but the ethnologically motivated post-binary counter-proposals have so far been more a case of wishful unthinking than anything else, being more verbal than properly conceptual. While we wait for the real thing, I prefer to put our contrasts into perspective and compare them to the distinctions which are actually operating in Amerindian cosmologies.

Perspectivism

The initial stimulus for the present reflections were the numerous references in Amazonian ethnography to an indigenous theory according to which the way humans perceive animals and other subjectivities that inhabit the world – gods, spirits, the dead, inhabitants of other cosmic levels, plants, meteorological phenomena, geographic accidents, objects and artefacts – differs profoundly from the way in which these beings see humans and see themselves.

Typically, in normal conditions, humans see humans as humans and animals as animals. With regard to spirits, seeing these usually invisible beings is a sure sign that 'conditions' are not normal. Predator animals and spirits, meanwhile, see humans as animals of prey to the same extent that animals of prey see humans as spirits or predator animals. Baer (1994:224), writing about the Machiguenga, notes: "a human being sees him- or herself as such. However, the moon, the snake, the jaguar and the mother of smallpox, see him or her as a tapir or a peccary that they kill". Seeing us as non-human beings, animals and spirits see *themselves* as humans. They perceive themselves to be or become anthropomorphic when they are in their own houses or villages and experience their own habits and characteristics in the form of culture. Thus they see their food as human food (jaguars see blood as manioc beer, the dead see crickets as fish, vultures see the maggots in rotting flesh as grilled meat, etc.). They see bodily attributes (fur, feathers, claws, beaks, etc.) as adornments or cultural instruments, and they see their social system as organised in just the same way as human institutions (with chiefs, shamans, rituals, marriage rules etc.). Here "to see as" refers literally to percepts, and not analogically to concepts, although in some cases, the emphasis is more on the categorical rather than sensory aspect of the phenomenon. In any case, shamans, the masters of cosmic schematism (Taussig 1987:462-63), dedicated to communicating and administering opposed perspectives are always there to make concepts sensible and render intuitions intelligible.

In sum, animals are people, or see themselves as persons. Such a notion is virtually always associated with the idea that the visible form of every species is an envelope (a 'clothing'), concealing an internal human form which is normally only visible to the eyes of the particular species, or to certain trans-specific beings, such as shamans.³ This internal form is the spirit of the animal: an intentionality or subjectivity which is formally identical with human consciousness, materialisable, let us say, in a human bodily schema concealed behind an animal mask. At first sight, then, we would have a distinction between an anthropomorphic essence of a spiritual kind, common to animate beings, and a variable bodily appearance, characteristic of each species. However this latter is not a fixed attribute but rather changeable and removable clothing. This notion of 'clothing' is, in fact, one of the privileged expressions of universal metamorphosis – spirits, the dead and shamans who assume animal form, animals that turn into other animals, humans who are inadvertently changed into animals – an omnipresent process in the "highly transformational world" (Rivière 1994) proposed by Amazonian cultures.⁴

These concepts are recorded in various South American ethnographies but generally they have been objects of short commentary, and they appear to be very unevenly elaborated by the cosmologies in question.⁵ These ideas can also be found, and perhaps with even greater significance, among the cultures of the northern regions of North America and of Asia, and more rarely, among some

tropical hunter-gatherer peoples of other continents.⁶ In South America, the societies of north-western Amazonia show the highest degree of elaboration of these ideas (see Århem 1993 and 1996 who largely inspired the preceding characterisation; Reichel-Dolmatoff 1985; S. Hugh-Jones 1996a). However, it is Vilaça's (1992) ethnography on Wari' cannibalism and Lima's (1995) work on Juruna epistemology which make the most directly related contributions to the present work, as they link the question of non-human points of view and of the relational nature of cosmological categories to the broader picture of a general economy of alterity (Viveiros de Castro 1993a, 1996a).⁷

Some initial clarifications are necessary. Firstly, perspectivism is rarely applicable to all animals (as well as encompassing other beings); it appears most frequently to be salient for species such as the great predators or carnivores, like the jaguar, the anaconda, vultures or the harpy eagle, as well as for typical human prey, such as the peccary, monkeys, fish, deer and the tapir. Therefore, one of the basic dimensions, possibly even the central dimension refers to the relative and relational status of predator and prey.⁸ The Amazonian ontology of predation provides a pragmatic and theoretical context which is highly favourable to perspectivism.

Secondly, personhood and 'perspectivity' – the ability to occupy a point of view – are questions of degree and situation, rather than fixed diacritical properties of this or that species. Some non-humans avail themselves of these potentialities in more complete ways than others; indeed some of them display them with an intensity that is superior to our own species and in this sense they are 'more persons' than humans are (Hallowell 1960:69). Aside from this, the question has an *a posteriori* essential quality to it. The possibility that a hitherto insignificant being reveals itself (in dreams, in shamanic discourse) as a prosopomorphic agent capable of affecting human affairs is always present. In this regard, personal experience, one's own or that of others, is more decisive than any substantive cosmological dogma.

Beyond this, it is not always the case that spirits or subjectivities are attributed to individual representatives of living species; there are examples of cosmologies which deny consciousness or any other spiritual predicate to all post-mythical animals.⁹ Nonetheless, as we know, the notion of spirit 'owners' of animals ('Mothers of game', 'Masters of peccaries' etc.) is widespread on the continent. These spirit masters, invariably endowed with intentionality analogous to that of humans, function as hypostases of the animal species with which they are associated, thereby creating an inter-subjective field for human-animal relations even where empirical animals are not spiritualised. It should be added that the distinction between animals seen in their spirit-aspect and the spirit masters of species is not always clear nor pertinent (Alexiades 1999:194). Besides, it is always possible that what we encounter in the forest which appeared to be just an animal reveals itself as the disguise of a spirit of a completely different nature.

Let us finally and above all remember, that if there is one virtually universal notion in Amerindian thought it is that of an original state of non-differentiation between humans and animals described in mythology:

[What is a myth?] – *If you were to ask an American Indian, it is very likely that he would answer: it is a story about the time when humans and animals did not yet distinguish themselves from one another. This definition seems to me to be very profound.* (Lévi-Strauss & Eribon 1988: 193)

Mythic narratives are filled with beings whose shape, name and behaviour inextricably mix human and non-human attributes in a common context of intercommunicability which is identical to the one that defines the current intra-human world. Thus Amerindian perspectivism finds in myth a, so to speak, virtual focus where the differences between points of view are simultaneously annulled and exacerbated. In the absolute discourse of myth, each species of being appears to others as it appears to itself – as human – and yet acts as though it was already displaying its distinctive and definitive nature as animal, plant or spirit. In a certain manner all characters appearing in mythology are shamans, which, incidentally, is directly claimed by some Amazonian cultures (Guss 1989:52). Discourse without subject, Lévi-Strauss said of myth (1964:19); discourse ‘only of subjects’ we could equally say, this time talking not about the enunciation of the discourse but rather of the enunciated. Myth, as the universal vanishing point of perspectivism, speaks of a state of being where bodies and names, souls and actions, self and others intermingle, floating in the same pre-subjective and pre-objective milieu. A milieu whose demise mythology precisely sets out to narrate, since any origin is also an end.

This end – also in the sense of finality – is as we know the differentiation between culture and nature analysed in the monumental quartet by Lévi-Strauss (1964, 1966, 1967, 1971). This process however, and the point has been relatively little noted, does not talk of the differentiation of humans out of animals as is the case in our modern evolutionist mythology. *The original condition common to humans and animals is not animality but rather humanity.* The great mythic division does not so much show culture distinguishing itself from nature but rather nature distancing itself from culture. Thus myths describe how animals lost the attributes inherited or maintained by humans (Lévi-Strauss 1985:14, 190; Brightman 1993:40, 160). Humans are those who continued the same as before: animals are ex-humans and humans are not ex-animals.¹⁰

In some Amazonian ethnographies we find the clearly formulated idea that humanity is the matter of the primordial *plenum*, or the original form of just about everything, not just of animals:

Campa mythology is largely the history of how, one by one, the primal Campa became irreversibly transformed into the first representatives of various species of animals and plants, as well as astronomical bodies or features of the terrain. [...] The development of the universe then, has been primarily a process of diversification, with mankind as the primal substance out of which many if not all of the categories of beings and things in the universe arose, the Campa of today being the descendants of those ancestral Campa who escaped being transformed. (Weiss 1972:169-70)

Thus our popular anthropology sees humanity as built from animal foundations which are normally hidden by culture – having once been ‘completely’ animals, we ‘deep down’ remain animals. By contrast, indigenous thought concludes the contrary, that having once been humans, animals and other beings of the cosmos continue to be humans, albeit in a non-evident way.

In sum, the “common predicate as nature’s beings is not man as species but humankind as condition” (Descola 1986:120). This distinction between the human species and the human condition should be emphasised.¹¹ The distinction has an evident connection with the idea of animal clothing concealing a common human-spiritual ‘essence’ as well as with the problem of the general meaning of perspectivism.

Shamanism

Amerindian perspectivism is associated with two recurring characteristics in Amazonia: the symbolic valorisation of hunting and the importance of shamanism.¹² With regard to hunting it is to be emphasised that this is a matter of symbolic centrality and not ecological necessity. Avid horticulturists such as the Tukano or Juruna – who aside from gardening live mainly by fishing – do not differ greatly from the great hunters of Canada and Alaska when it comes to the cosmological weight placed on animal predation (be it hunting or fishing), or with regard to the spiritual subjectivisation of animals and the theory that the universe is populated with extra-human intentionalities endowed with their own perspectives.¹³ In this sense the spiritualization of plants, meteorological phenomena and artefacts could perhaps be seen as secondary or derivative in view of the spiritualization of animals. The animal appears to be the prototypical extra-human Other with a special relationship to other prototypical figures of alterity such as affines.¹⁴

This widespread hunter’s ideology is also and above all an ideology of shamans. The notion that present-day non-humans have an invisible prosopomorphic side is a fundamental presupposition of various dimensions of indigenous

practice but this idea is fore-grounded in one particular context, which is shamanism. Amazonian shamanism may be defined as the manifest aptitude of certain individuals to deliberately cross bodily boundaries and adopt the perspective of allo-specific subjectivities so as to manage the relations between these beings and humans. Seeing non-human beings as these see themselves (as humans), shamans are capable of playing the role of active interlocutors in transspecific dialogues. But above all they are capable of returning to tell the tale, which is something that laymen are hardly able to do. The encounter with or exchange of perspectives is a dangerous process, it is a political art – a diplomacy. If western ‘multiculturalism’ is relativism as public policy, then Amerindian shamanic perspectivism is multinaturalism as cosmic politics.

Shamanism is a way of doing things which implies a way of knowing them, or rather, a certain ideal of knowledge. In various regards, this ideal is the polar opposite of objectivist epistemologies favoured by western modernity. In the latter, the category of object provides the *telos*: to know is to objectify; it is to be able to distinguish in the object what is intrinsic to it from what pertains to the knowing subject and which as such was unwittingly and/or inevitably projected onto the object. Thus to know is to desubjectify, to render explicit the part of the subject present in the object in order to reduce it to an ideal minimum. Just like objects, subjects are seen as resulting from processes of objectification: the subject is constituted by or recognises itself in the objects it produces and knows itself objectively when it succeeds in seeing itself ‘from the outside’, as a ‘that’. The name of our epistemological game is objectification. What is not objectified remains unreal and abstract. The Other takes the form of a thing.

Amerindian shamanism appears to be guided by the inverse principle. To know is to personify, to take the point of view of that which is to be known – of what or rather of who; for shamanic knowledge envisages ‘something’ which is ‘someone’, another subject or agent. The Other takes the form of a person.¹⁵

To use fashionable vocabulary, I would say that shamanic personification or subjectification reflects a propensity for universalising the “intentional stance” highlighted by Dennett (1978) and other modern philosophers of mind (or philosophers of the modern mind). More precisely – given that Indians are perfectly capable of adopting the “physical” and “functional” stances (op. cit) in their daily lives – , I would say that we have before us an epistemological ideal, which far from trying to reduce ‘surrounding intentionality’ to zero in order to attain an absolutely objective representation of the world, has taken the opposite decision: true knowledge aims at the revelation of a maximum of intentionality, by way of a process of systematic and deliberate “abduction of agency” (Gell 1998). I said above that shamanism was a *political* art. What I am now saying is that it is a *political art*.¹⁶ A good shamanic interpretation succeeds in seeing each *event* as being in reality an *action*, an expression of internal states or intentional predicates of some agent (ibid.:16-18). The success of the interpretation is directly proportional

to the order of intentionality which can be attributed to the object.¹⁷ An entity or a state of things which does not lend itself to subjectification, or to the determination of its social relation with that which it knows is shamanically insignificant – it is an epistemic residue, an ‘impersonal factor’ resistant to precise knowledge. Needless to say our objectivist epistemology takes the opposite direction: it considers the intentional stance of common sense as merely convenient fiction, something we adopt when the behaviour of the target-object is too complicated to be disassembled into elementary physical processes. An exhaustive scientific explanation of the world must be able to reduce all actions to a chain of causal events and these must be reducible to materially dense interactions (there is no such thing as ‘action’ at a distance).

In sum, if in the naturalist world of modernity, a subject is an insufficiently analysed object, then the Amerindian interpretative convention follows the inverse principle: an object is an incompletely analysed subject. Here it is necessary to know how to personify because it is necessary to personify in order to know. The object of interpretation is the counter-interpretation of the object.¹⁸ For it must be either expanded until it reaches its full intentional form – as spirit, as animal in its human shape – or at least, have its relation with a subject demonstrated, that is be determined as something that exists “in the vicinity” of an agent (Gell *op. cit.*). With regard to this second option, the idea that non-human agents perceive themselves and their behaviour in the guise of human culture plays a crucial role. The translation of ‘culture’ into the worlds of extra-human subjectivities has as its corollary the redefinition of various ‘natural’ events and objects as indices for the abduction of social agency. The most common case is the transformation of something which for humans is a mere brute fact, into an artefact or highly civilised form of behaviour from the point of view of another species: what we call ‘blood’ is the ‘beer’ of the jaguar, what we take for a muddy waterhole, tapirs take as a large ceremonial house, and so forth. Artefacts possess this interestingly ambiguous ontology: they are objects but of necessity they point to a subject since they are like solidified actions, material incarnations of a non-material intentionality (Gell 1998:16-18, 67). And so it is that what some call ‘nature’ can well be the ‘culture’ of others. This is then a lesson from which anthropologists might well learn.¹⁹

Animism

The reader will have noticed that my ‘perspectivism’ is reminiscent of the notion of ‘animism’ recently recuperated by Descola (1992, 1996) to describe a way of articulating the natural and social series which would be symmetrical and inverse to totemism. Stating that all conceptualisations of non-humans always refer to the social domain, Descola distinguishes three modes of “objectifying nature”:

totemism, where the differences between natural species are used to logically organise the order internal to society, that is, where the relationship between nature and culture is metaphorical and marked by discontinuity both within and between series; animism, where the “elementary categories of social life” organise the relations *between* humans and natural species, thus defining a social continuity of a socio-morphic kind, between nature and culture, founded on the attribution of “human dispositions and social attributes” to “natural beings” (id. 1996:87); and naturalism, typical of western cosmologies, which supposes an ontological duality between nature, the domain of necessity, and culture, the domain of spontaneity, areas separated by metonymic discontinuity. The ‘animic mode’ is characteristic of societies in which animals are the “strategic focus of the objectification of nature ... and of its socialisation” (id. 1992: 115) as is the case in indigenous America, reigning supreme in those social morphologies lacking in elaborate internal segmentations. But this mode can also be found co-existing or combined with totemism, wherein such segmentations exist, as in the case of the Bororo and their *aroe/bope* dualism (Crocker 1985).

Descola’s theory is yet another example of the general dissatisfaction with the unilateral emphasis on metaphor in totemism and classificatory logic which characterises the Lévi-Straussian image of the savage mind. This dissatisfaction gave rise to various recent attempts at exploring the dark side of the structuralist moon. These attempts tried to recover the radical sense of concepts such as “participation” or “animism”, which had been distanced by Lévi-Strauss’ intellectualism.²⁰ Nonetheless it is clear that many of Descola’s propositions (and he would be the first to admit this) are already present in the works of that author. Thus the “elementary categories structuring social life” that organise the relations between humans and non-humans are, in the Amazonian cases discussed by Descola, essentially categories of kinship, particularly the categories of consanguinity and affinity. Meanwhile, in *The Savage Mind* the following observation may be found:

[M]arriage exchanges can furnish a model directly applicable to the mediation between nature and culture among peoples where totemic classifications and functional specialization, if present at all, have only a very limited yield. (Lévi-Strauss 1962b:128)

This very concisely prefigures what many ethnographers came to write later about the role of affinity as cosmological operator in Amazonia. Moreover, in suggesting the complementary distribution of this model of exchange between nature and culture and of totemic systems, Lévi-Strauss appears to be envisaging something very similar to the animic model discussed here. Further convergence: Descola mentions the Bororo as an example of the coexistence of animism and totemism; but he could also have cited the Ojibwa case where the coexistence of

the systems of *totem* and *manido* (Lévi-Strauss 1962a:25-33) served as a matrix for the general opposition between totemism and sacrifice (id. 1962b:295-302) and which can be directly interpreted within the framework of a distinction between totemism and animism.²¹

I shall concentrate my comments on the contrast between animism and naturalism since this is a good point of departure for appreciating the characteristic difference of Amerindian perspectivism. I analyse the contrast in a slightly different sense to the original, since I believe that Descola's description of modern naturalism purely in terms of "ontological dualism" is somewhat incomplete. As far as totemism is concerned this seems to me to be a heterogeneous phenomenon, primarily classificatory rather than cosmological: totemism is not a system of *relations* between nature and culture as is the case in the other two modes, but rather of purely logical and differential *correlations*. For now, let us therefore stay with animism and naturalism.

Animism could be defined as an ontology which postulates the social character of relations between humans and non-humans: the space between nature and society is itself social. Naturalism is founded on the inverted axiom: relations between society and nature are themselves natural. Indeed, if in the animic mode the distinction nature/culture is internal to the social world, humans and animals being immersed in the same socio-cosmic medium (and in this sense, human society is one natural phenomenon among others), then in naturalist ontology, the distinction 'nature/culture' is internal to nature (and in this sense, human society is one natural phenomenon amongst others). Animism has society as the unmarked pole, naturalism has nature: these poles function, respectively and contrastively as the universal dimension of each mode. Thus animism and naturalism are asymmetric and metonymic structures (which distinguishes them from totemism, a metaphoric and equipollent structure).²²

In our naturalist ontology the nature/society interface is natural: humans are organisms like others, body-objects in 'ecological' interaction with other bodies and forces, all of them ruled by the necessary laws of biology and physics; 'productive forces' harness natural forces. Social relations, that is, contractual or instituted relations among subjects, can only exist internal to human society. But this is the problem of naturalism: how 'non -natural' can these relations really be? Given the universality of nature, the status of the human and social world is profoundly unstable and, as our tradition shows, it perpetually oscillates between a naturalistic monism (socio-biology or evolutionary psychology being two of its current avatars) and an ontological dualism of nature/culture (culturalism or symbolic anthropology being some of its contemporary expressions).²³ For all that, the assertion of this latter dualism and its correlates (body/mind, pure reason/practical reason etc), only reinforces the ultimate referential character of the notion of Nature, by revealing itself to be the direct descendant of the theological opposition between said Nature and *Supernature*, which is of transparent etymol-

ogy. For Culture is the modern name of Spirit – let us recall the distinction between *Naturwissenschaften* and *Geisteswissenschaften* – or at least it is the name of the uncertain compromise between Nature and Grace. Of animism, we would be tempted to say that the instability is located in the opposite pole: here the problem is how to administer the mixture of culture and nature present in animals and not as among ourselves, the combination of humanity and animality constituting humans; the issue is to differentiate a nature from universal sociomorphism, and, accordingly, a ‘particularly’ human body from a trans-specific ‘public’ spirit.

Very well. However, is it really possible and above all interesting to define animism as a projection of differences and qualities internal to the human world onto the non-human world, that is to define it as a “socio-centric” model where intra-human categories and relations are used to map the universe (Descola 1996)? This projectionist interpretation is explicit in some glosses on the theory: “if totemic systems model society after nature, then animic systems model nature after society” (Århem 1996:185). The problem here, obviously, is to avoid any undesirable proximity with the traditional sense of ‘animism’, or with the reduction of ‘primitive classifications’ to emanations of social morphology; but equally the problem is to go beyond other classical characterisations of the relation between society and nature, notably the one we owe to Radcliffe-Brown in his first article on totemism.²⁴

Ingold (1991; 1996) showed how schemes of analogical projection or social modelling of nature escape naturalist reductionism only to fall into a nature/culture dualism which by distinguishing ‘really natural’ nature from ‘culturally constructed’ nature reveals itself to be a typical cosmological antinomy faced with infinite regression. The notion of model or analogy supposes a previous distinction between a domain wherein social relations are constitutive and literal and another where they are representational and metaphorical. In other words, the idea that humans and animals are linked by common sociality is contradicted by its dependence on a prior ontological discontinuity. Animism interpreted as human sociality projected onto the non-human world would be nothing but the metaphor of a metonymy, remaining captive to a ‘totemic’ or classificatory reading.²⁵

Amongst the questions remaining to be resolved, therefore, is that of knowing whether animism can be described as a figurative use of categories pertaining to the human social domain to conceptualise the domain of non-humans and their relations with the former. This leads one to question the point to which perspectivism, which might be seen as a kind of corollary of Descola’s ‘animism’, really expresses an anthropocentrism. Ultimately, what does it mean to say that animals are persons?

Different question: if animism depends on the attribution of human cognitive and sensory faculties to animals, and the same form of subjectivity, i.e. if animals are ‘essentially’ humans, then what in the end is the difference between humans

and animals? If animals are people, then why do they not see us as people? Why, to be precise, the perspectivism? It is also necessary to ask whether the notion of contingent bodily forms ('clothing') can in fact be described in terms of an opposition between 'appearance' and 'essence' (Descola 1986:120; Århem 1993:122; Rivière 1994; S. Hugh-Jones 1996a). Finally, if animism is a way of objectifying nature in which the dualism of nature/culture does not hold, then what is to be done with the abundant indications regarding the centrality of this opposition to South American cosmologies? Are we dealing with just another 'totemic illusion', if not with an ingenuous projection of our Western dualism? Is it possible to make more than just synoptic use of the concepts of Nature and Culture or are they just "blanket labels" (Descola 1996:84) used in *Mythologiques* to organise the many semantic contrasts in American myths, contrasts that are irreducible to a single, fundamental dichotomy?

Ethnocentrism

In a well-known essay, Lévi-Strauss observes that for savages humanity ceases at the boundary of the group, a notion which is exemplified by the widespread auto-ethnonym meaning 'real humans', which, in turn, implies a definition of strangers as somehow pertaining to the domain of the extra-human. Therefore, ethnocentrism would not be the sad privilege of the West, but a natural ideological attitude, inherent in human collective life. Lévi-Strauss illustrates the universal reciprocity of this attitude with an anecdote:

In the Greater Antilles, some years after the discovery of America, whilst the Spaniards sent out investigating commissions to ascertain whether or not the natives had a soul, the latter were engaged in the drowning of white prisoners in order to verify, through prolonged watching, whether or not their corpses were subject to putrefaction (Lévi-Strauss 1952:329)

From this parable Lévi-Strauss draws the famous paradoxical conclusion: "The barbarian is first of all the man who believes in barbarism". Some years later he reused the example of the Antilles, but this time underlining the asymmetry of perspectives: in their investigations regarding the humanity of the Other, the Europeans appealed to social science, whereas the Indians looked to the natural sciences; where the former concluded that the Indians were animals, the latter were content to doubt whether Europeans were divinities (id. 1955a:82-83). "*In equal ignorance*" the author concludes, the latter attitude was more worthy of human beings.

As we shall see, the anecdote reveals something else. For now, the general point is simple: the Indians, like the European invaders, considered that only the

group to which they belonged incarnated humanity; strangers were on the other side of the border which separates humans from animals and spirits, culture from nature and supernature. As matrix and condition for the existence of ethnocentrism, the nature/culture opposition appears to be a universal of social apperception. In sum, the answer to the question of the Spanish investigators was positive: the savages really did have souls.²⁶

At the time when Lévi-Strauss was writing these lines, the strategy for vindicating the full humanity of savages was to demonstrate that they made the same distinctions as we do: the proof that they were true humans was that they considered that they alone were true humans. Like us, they distinguished culture from nature and they too believed that *Naturvölker* are always the others. The universality of the cultural distinction between nature and culture bore witness to the universality of Culture as human Nature.

Now however, everything has changed. The savages are no longer ethnocentric but rather cosmocentric; instead of having to prove that they are humans because they distinguish themselves from animals, we now have to recognise how *inhuman we* are for opposing humans to non-humans in a way they never did: for them nature and culture are part of the same socio-cosmic field. Not only would Amerindians leave a wide berth between themselves and the Great Cartesian Divide which separated humanity from animality, but their views anticipate the fundamental lessons of ecology which we are only now in a position to assimilate (Reichel-Dolmatoff 1976; Wagner 1977). Before, the Indians' refusal to concede predicates of humanity to other men was a matter for ironic commentary; now we stress that they extend such predicates far beyond the frontiers of their own species in a demonstration of "ecosophic" knowledge (Århem 1993) which we should emulate in as far as the limits of our objectivism permit.²⁷ Formerly, it had been necessary to combat the assimilation of the savage mind to narcissistic animism, the infantile stage of naturalism, showing that totemism affirmed the cognitive distinction between culture and nature. Today animism is again attributed to savages, but this time it is largely proclaimed (not by Descola, I hasten to underline) to be the true or at least 'valid' recognition of the universal mixing of subjects and objects, humans and non-humans, to which we modern people have always been blind due to our foolish, not to say sinful, habit of thinking in dichotomies. Thus are we to be saved from modern hubris by primitive and post-modern hybrids.

Two antinomies then, which are in fact only one: either Amerindians are ethnocentrically 'stingy' in the extension of their concept of humanity and they totemically oppose nature and culture; or they are cosmocentric and animic and do not profess to such a distinction, being models of relativist tolerance in postulating a multiplicity of points of view on the world. In sum: a fierce self-closure, or, very much to the contrary, a radical "opening to the Other" (Lévi-Strauss 1991: xvii)?

I believe that the solution to these antinomies lies not in favouring one branch over the other, sustaining, for example, the argument that the most recent characterisation of American attitudes is the correct one and relegating the other to the outer darkness of pre-post-modernity. Rather the point is to show that the thesis as well as the antithesis are true (both correspond to solid ethnographic intuitions), but that they apprehend the same phenomena from different angles; and also it is to show that both are imprecise in that they refer to a substantivist understanding of the categories of nature and culture (whether it be to affirm or negate them) which is not applicable to Amerindian cosmologies.

The first point to be considered is that the Amerindian words which are usually translated as 'human being' and which figure in those supposedly ethnocentric self-designations do not denote humanity as a natural species. They refer rather to the social condition of personhood, and, especially when modified by intensifiers such as 'true', 'real', 'genuine' they function, pragmatically if not syntactically, less as *nouns* than as *pronouns*. They indicate the position of the subject; they are enunciative markers, not names. Far from manifesting a semantic shrinking of a common name to a proper name (taking 'people' to be the name of the tribe), these words move in the opposite direction, going from substantive to perspective (using 'people' as a collective pronoun 'we people/us'). For this very reason, indigenous categories of collective identity have that enormous variability of scope that characterises pronouns, contrastively marking Ego's immediate kin, his/her local group, all humans, or even all beings endowed with subjectivity: their coagulation as 'ethnonyms' seems largely to be an artefact of ethnographic description. Nor is it by chance that the majority of Amerindian ethnonyms which enter the literature are not self-designations, but rather names (frequently pejorative) conferred by other groups: ethnonymic objectivation is primordially applied to others, not to the ones in the position of subject (see Urban 1996:32-44). Ethnonyms are names of third parties; they belong to the category of '*they*' rather than to the category of '*we*'.²⁸ This, by the way, is consistent with a widespread avoidance of self-reference on the level of personal onomastics: names are neither spoken by their bearers nor in their presence: to name is to externalise, to separate (from) the subject.

Thus self-references such as 'people' mean 'person', not 'member of the human species', and they are personal pronouns registering the point of view of the subject talking, not proper names. To say, then, that animals and spirits are people is to say that they are persons, and to attribute to non-humans the capacities of conscious intentionality and agency which define the enunciative position of the subject. Such capacities are objectified as the soul or spirit with which these non-humans are endowed. Whatever possesses a soul is a subject and whoever has a soul is capable of having a point of view. Amerindian souls or subjectivities, be they human or non-human are thus perspectival categories, cosmological

deictics, whose analysis calls not so much for substantialist psychology as for a pragmatic of signs (Viveiros de Castro 1992b; Taylor 1993b, 1996).²⁹

Thus every being to whom a point of view is attributed would be a subject; or better, wherever there is a point of view there is a subject position. Whilst our constructionist epistemology can be summed up in the Saussurean formula: "*the point of view creates the object*" – the subject being the original, fixed condition whence the point of view emanates – Amerindian perspectivism proceeds along the lines that the *point of view creates the subject*; whatever is activated or 'agented' by the point of view will be a subject.³⁰ This is why terms such as *wari'* (Vilaça 1992), *dene* (McDonnell 1984) or *masa* (Århem 1993) mean 'people', but they can be used for – and therefore used by – very different classes of beings: used by humans they denote human beings; but used by peccaries, howler monkeys or beavers they self-refer to peccaries, howler monkeys or beavers.

As it happens, however, these non-humans placed in the subject perspective do not merely 'call' themselves 'people'; they see themselves morphologically and culturally as *humans*, as the shamans explain, and more generally lay people profess.³¹ The symbolic spiritualisation of animals would imply their imaginary hominisation and culturalisation; thus the anthropocentric character of indigenous thought would seem to be unquestionable. However, I believe that something completely different is at issue. Any being which vicariously occupies the point of view of reference, standing in the position of subject, sees itself as a member of the human species. The human bodily form and human culture – the schemata of perception and action 'embodied' in specific dispositions – are nominal attributes of the same type as the self-designations discussed above. They are reflexive or apperceptive schematisms ("reifications" *sensu* Strathern 1988), by which all subjects apprehend themselves, and not literal and constitutive human predicates projected metaphorically, i.e. improperly onto non-humans. These attributes are immanent in the viewpoint and move with it. A human being – naturally – enjoys the same prerogative and therefore, as Baer's misleading tautology tells us (see *supra*) "sees him- or herself as such".

Let us be clear: it is not that animals are subjects because they are humans in disguise, but rather that they are human because they are potential subjects. This is to say *Culture is the Subject's nature*; it is the form in which every subject experiences its own nature. Animism is not a projection of substantive human qualities cast onto non-humans; what animism expresses is a real equivalence of the relations that humans and non-humans have with themselves: wolves see wolves as humans see humans – as humans. "Man" can certainly be a "wolf unto man"; but in another sense, a wolf is a man unto wolves. For, as I suggested, the common condition of humans and animals is humanity, not animality, because *humanity* is the name for the general form taken by the Subject.

The attribution of human-type consciousness and intentionality (not to speak of bodily form and cultural habits) to non-human beings is usually indiscrimi-

nately referred to as 'anthropocentrism' or 'anthropomorphism'. I, however, think that these two labels should be taken to designate opposing cosmological attitudes. For example, Western popular evolutionism is fiercely anthropocentric but does not seem to me to be particularly anthropomorphic. In turn, indigenous animism can be characterised as anthropomorphic but certainly not as anthropocentric. For, if sundry other beings besides humans are 'human' – then we humans are not that special. 'Primitive narcissism' is a red herring. In order to find a real case of narcissism it is necessary to look to modernity. To the young Marx for example, who wrote the following about our species):

In creating an objective world by his practical activity, in working-up inorganic nature, man proves himself a conscious species being. ... Admittedly animals also produce. ... But an animal only produces what it immediately needs for itself or its young. It produces one-sidedly, while man produces universally. ... An animal produces only itself, whilst man reproduces the whole of nature. ... An animal forms things in accordance with the standard and the need of the species to which it belongs, whilst man knows how to produce in accordance with the standards of other species (Marx 1961 [1844]:75-76, in Sahlin 1996).

Whatever Marx intended to say with this proposition that man "produces universally", I read it as an affirmation that man is the universal animal: an interesting idea. (If man is the universal animal, then are other animal species each particular humanities?). While it appears to be in agreement with the Amerindian notion that humanity is the universal form of agency, Marx's judgement is in fact its absolute inversion. He is saying that humans can be any kind of animal, that we have more Being than any other species; Indians, on the contrary, say that any animal can be human, that there is more Being in an animal than meets the eye. Man is the universal animal in two entirely different senses: universality is anthropocentric in Marx's case and anthropomorphic in the indigenous case.

Above I argued that animism needs to be understood as expressing the logical equivalence of the reflexive relations that each species, including humans, entertains with itself. Let us, in fact, consider this paragraph by Marie-Françoise Guéron on Tsimshian cosmology from the northwest coast:

[...] If one is to follow the main myths, for the human being, the world looks like a human community surrounded by an spiritual realm, including an animal kingdom with all beings coming and going according to their kinds and interfering with each others' lives; however, if one were to go and become an animal, a salmon for instance, one would discover that salmon people are to themselves as human beings are to us, and that to them, we human beings, would look like naxnoq, or perhaps bears feeding on their salmon. Such translation goes through several levels. For instance, the leaves of the cotton tree falling in the Skeena River are the

salmon of the salmon people. I do not know what the salmon would be for the leaf, but I guess they appear what we look like to the salmon — unless they looked like bears. (Guédon 1984:141-42).

Therefore, if salmon appears to salmon as humans appear to humans – this is animism – salmon do *not* appear human to humans, *nor* humans to salmon – this is perspectivism.

Maybe animism and perspectivism have a more profound relationship to totemism than foreseen in Descola's model. Why do animals (or others) see themselves as humans? Precisely, I suggest, because humans see them as animals, seeing themselves as humans. Peccaries cannot see themselves as peccaries (and then speculate to the effect that perhaps humans and other beings are peccaries underneath their specific clothing) because this is the form in which they are seen by humans. If humans see themselves as humans and are seen as non-humans – as animals or spirits – by non-humans, then animals must necessarily see themselves as humans. This asymmetric skewing of perspectivist animism contrasts interestingly with the symmetry exhibited by totemism. In the first case, a correlation of reflexive identities (a human is to itself as a specific animal is to itself) provides the substrate to the relation between the human series and the animal series; in the second case, a correlation of the differences articulates the two series. A correlation of differences produces a symmetrical and reversible structure, whilst a correlation of identities produces the asymmetrical and seemingly 'projective' structure of animism. This occurs, I believe, because what animism claims, ultimately, is not so much that animals are similar to humans but rather that they – like we – are different from themselves: the difference is internal or intensive, not external or extensive. If we all have souls, nobody is identical. If anything can be human, then nobody is unequivocally human. Humanity taken as the general ground of Being renders humanity taken as a distinctive, species-specific figure very problematic.

Multinaturalism

The idea of a world that contains a multiplicity of subjective positions quickly brings to mind the notion of relativism. Indeed, direct or indirect mention of relativism is frequent in the description of Amerindian cosmologies. Consider this judgment put forth by Kaj Århem, the ethnographer of the Makuna. After describing the perspectival universe of these people from northwest Amazonia in minute detail, Århem concludes: the notion of multiple points of view on reality, implies, in so far as the Makuna are concerned, that "*any perspective is equally valid and true*" and that "*a true and correct representation of the world does not exist*" (1993: 124; my emphasis).

To be sure, Århem is right; but only in a certain sense. For it is very likely that, as far as *humans* are concerned, Makuna people would say, quite to the contrary, that there is indeed only *one* true and right representation of the world. If we, for example, began to see the worms that infest a corpse as grilled fish, like vultures do, then we could conclude that there was something very wrong with us. For this would signify that we were turning into vultures, which normally is not part of anybody's plan: it is the sign of illness or worse. Perspectives must be kept separate. Only shamans, who are so to speak species-androgynous, are able to make these distinct perspectives communicate with one another, and only under special and controlled conditions.³²

But there is a far more important question here. Is Amerindian perspectivist theory really, as Århem argues, supposing a multiplicity of *representations* of the same world? It is enough to consider what ethnographies are saying, in order to perceive that it is the exact opposite that is happening: all beings see ('represent') the world in the *same* manner – what changes is the *world* that they see. Animals use the same categories and values as humans: their worlds, like ours, revolve around hunting and fishing, cooking and fermented drinks, around cross-cousins and war, around initiation rites, shamans, chiefs, spirits etc. (Guédon op.cit.: 142). If the moon, snakes and jaguars see humans as tapirs or wild pigs, this is because, like us, they eat tapirs and wild pigs, food appropriate for people. It could only be like this, for, being people in their own department, non-humans see things *like* 'we' see them. But the things *that* they see are other: what for us is blood, for jaguars is manioc beer; what for the souls of the dead is a rotting corpse, for us is fermenting manioc; what we see as a muddy waterhole, tapirs see as a large ceremonial house, and so on.

At first sight, the idea seems slightly counter-intuitive, because when we start thinking about it, it appears to transform itself into its opposite, just like those visual illusions known as figure-ground reversals. For example, Gerald Weiss describes the world of the Campa as "a world of relative appearances, where different types of beings see the same things differently" (1972:170). Once again, in a certain sense this is true. But what Weiss is not able to 'see', is that the fact that different types of beings see the same things differently is simply a consequence of the fact that different types of beings see different things in the same way. For what counts as "the same things"? Same in relation to whom, to what species? The spectre of the thing-in-itself haunts Weiss' formulation.

Perspectivism is not relativism but multinaturalism. Cultural relativism, a type of multiculturalism, supposes a diversity of subjective and partial representations, each striving to grasp an external and unified nature, which remains perfectly indifferent to those representations. Amerindians propose the opposite: a representational or phenomenological unity which is purely pronominal, indifferently applied to real diversity. One single 'culture', multiple 'natures'; constant episte-

mology, variable ontology – perspectivism is multinaturalist, for a perspective is not a representation.

A perspective is not a representation because representations are a property of the mind or spirit, whereas the point of view is located in the body.³³ The ability to adopt a point of view is undoubtedly a power of the soul, and non-humans are subjects in so far as they have (or are) a spirit; but the differences between viewpoints – and a viewpoint is nothing if not a difference – lies not in the soul. Since the soul is formally identical in all species, it can only see the same things everywhere – the difference is given in the specificity of bodies. This permits answers to be found to the questions posed above: if non-humans are persons and have souls, then what distinguishes them from humans? And why, being people, do they not see us as people?

Animals see in the *same* way as we do *different* things because their bodies are different from ours. I am not referring to physiological differences – as far as that is concerned, Amerindians recognise a basic uniformity of bodies – but rather to affects, dispositions or capacities, which render the body of every species unique: what it eats, how it communicates, where it lives, whether it is gregarious or solitary and so forth. The morphology of the body is a powerful sign of these differences in affect, although it can be deceptive since a human appearance could, for example, be concealing a jaguar-affect. Thus what I call *body* is not a synonym for distinctive substance or characteristic anatomy; it is an assemblage of affects or ways of being that constitute a *habitus*. Between the formal subjectivity of souls and the substantial materiality of organisms there is this central plane which is occupied by the body as a bundle of affects and capacities and which is the origin of perspectives. Far from the spiritual essentialism of relativism, perspectivism is a bodily *mannerism*.

The difference between bodies, however, is only apprehendable from an exterior viewpoint, by an other, since, for itself, every type of being has the same form (the generic form of a human being): bodies are the way in which alterity is apprehended as such. In normal conditions we do not see animals as people, and vice-versa, because our respective bodies (and the perspectives which they allow) are different. Thus if Culture is a reflexive perspective of the subject, objectified through the concept of soul, it can be said that Nature is the viewpoint which the subject takes of other body-affects; in other words, if Culture is the Subject's nature, then *Nature is the form of the other as body*, that is, as the something for a somebody. Culture takes the self-referential form of the pronoun 'I'; nature is the form *par excellence* of 'non-person' or object, indicated by the impersonal pronoun 'it' (Benveniste 1966a:256).

If, in the eyes of Amerindians, the body makes the difference, then it is easily understood why, in the anecdote told by Lévi-Strauss, the methods of investigation into the humanity of the other, employed by the Spanish and the inhabitants of the Antilles, showed such asymmetry. For the Europeans, the issue was to de-

cide whether the others possessed a soul; for the Indians, the aim was to find out what kind of body the others had. For the Europeans the great diacritic, the marker of difference in perspective, is the soul (are Indians humans or animals?); for the Indians it is the body (are Europeans humans or spirits?). The Europeans never doubted that the Indians had bodies – animals have them too; the Indians never doubted that the Europeans had souls – animals have them too. What the Indians wanted to know was whether the bodies of those ‘souls’ were capable of the same affects as their own – whether they had the bodies of humans or the bodies of spirits, non-putrescible and protean. In sum: European ethnocentrism consisted in denying that other bodies have the same souls as they themselves; Amerindian ethnocentrism in doubting whether other souls had the same bodies.

As Ingold has stressed (1994; 1996), the status of humans in Western thought is essentially ambiguous: on the one hand, humankind is an animal species amongst others, and animality is a domain that includes humans; on the other hand, humanity is a moral condition which excludes animals. These two statuses co-exist in the problematic and disjunctive notion of ‘human nature’.³⁴ In other words, our cosmology postulates a physical continuity and a metaphysical discontinuity between humans and animals, the former making of ‘Man’ an object for the natural sciences, the latter an object for the humanities. Spirit is our great differentiator: it raises us above animals and matter in general, it makes each person unique before his or her fellow beings, it distinguishes cultures or historical periods in terms of their collective consciousness or spirit of the era. The body, by contrast, is the major integrator, the vehicle for ‘modern participation’: it connects us to the rest of the living, united by a universal substrate (DNA, carbon chemistry) which, in turn, links up with the ultimate nature of all material ‘bodies’.³⁵ In contrast to this, Amerindians postulate a metaphysical continuity and a physical discontinuity between the beings of the cosmos, the former resulting in animism – i.e. in ‘primitive participation’ –, the latter in perspectivism. The spirit or soul – here not an immaterial substance but rather a reflexive form – integrates, while the body – not a material organism but a system of active affects – differentiates.

Perspectivism is not relativism but relationalism. Let us look at another discussion of the alleged Amazonian relativism: this time by Renard-Casevitz (1991) in her book on Machiguenga mythology. She discusses a myth in which the human protagonists visit various villages inhabited by strange people who call the snakes, bats and fireballs that they eat, “fish”, “agouti” and “macaw” (human food). The author notes that indigenous perspectivism is not exactly cultural relativism:

The myth states that there are transcultural and transnational norms in operation everywhere. These norms determine the same tastes and distastes, the dietary values and the prohibitions or avoidances. (...) The mythic misunderstandings stem from visions that are out of phase with one another, not from barbaric tastes or from improper use of language (op.cit.:25-26; my emphases)

But this does not prevent the author from seeing something perfectly banal:

This putting into perspective [mise en perspective] is merely the application and transposition of universal social practices, such as the fact that X's mother and father are Y's parents-in-law...The variability of the denomination as a function of the place occupied explains how A can at once be fish for X and snake for Y (op. cit.:29)

The problem is that generalising the positional relativity proper to life in society, with its application to the interspecific or intergeneric differences, paradoxically results in making human (i.e. Machiguenga) culture natural, that is absolute: everybody eats 'fish', nobody eats 'snake'.

Renard-Casevitz' analogy, between kinship positions and what passes as fish or snake for various types of being is, however, very interesting. Let us make a mental experiment. Kinship terms are open relaters or logical operators; they pertain to that class of names that define something in terms of its relations to another thing (linguists will surely have a name for such words, maybe 'two-place predicates' or something like that). Whereas concepts such as 'fish' or 'tree', on the other hand, are 'proper' nouns, closed or well circumscribed, ascribed to an object by virtue of its self-sustaining and autonomous properties. Now, what seems to happen in Amerindian perspectivism is that substances known by nouns such as 'fish', 'snake', 'hammock' or 'canoe' are used as though they were relaters, something between noun and pronoun, the substantive and the deictic. (Supposedly, there is a difference between names of natural kinds such as 'fish' and names of artefacts such as 'hammock' – see below.) Somebody is a father only because there is somebody else of whom he is the father: paternity is a relation, while 'fishness' or 'snakeness' are intrinsic properties of fish and snakes. What happens in perspectivism, however, is that something is *also* only a fish because there exists somebody of whom this thing is the fish.

But if to say that crickets are the fish of the dead or that mud holes are the hammocks of tapirs is really like saying that Nina, the daughter of my sister Isabel, is my niece – Renard-Casevitz' argument – then, there is indeed no relativism involved. Isabel is not a mother *for* Nina, from Nina's point of view, in the usual, subjectivist, sense of the expression. She is *Nina's mother*, she is really and objectively her mother and I am in fact her uncle. The relation is internal and genitive – my sister is somebody's mother, and I am that person's uncle, exactly like the

crickets of the living are the fish of the dead – and not an external, representational connection, of the type “X is the fish for somebody”, which implies that it is merely *represented* as fish, whatever it may be ‘in itself’. It would be absurd to say that, since Nina is Isabel’s daughter but not mine, she therefore is not a ‘daughter’ *for me* – because in fact she is, a daughter *of my sister* to be precise. In *Process & Reality*, Whitehead observes: “It must be remembered that the phrase ‘actual world’ is like ‘yesterday’ or ‘tomorrow’, in that it alters its meaning according to standpoint” (Whitehead 1929:65, in Latour 1994:197). Thus a point of view is not a subjective opinion; there is nothing subjective in the concepts of ‘yesterday’ or ‘tomorrow’, just as there is not in notions of ‘my mother’ or ‘your brother’. The real world of varying species depends on their points of view because the ‘world’ is made up of the different species; it is the abstract space of divergence between them in terms of point of view: there are no points of view *on* things – things and beings *are points of view* (Deleuze 1988:203). The question here, therefore, is not “how monkeys see the world” (Cheney & Seyfarth 1990) but what sort of a world is described through monkeys, what is the world of which they *are* the point of view.

Let us imagine that all ‘substances’ that inhabit Amerindian worlds are of this type. Let us suppose that just as two individuals are siblings because they have the same parents, they would be conspecifics because they have the same fish, the same snake, the same canoe and so forth. It can now be understood, then, why animals are so frequently thought of as linked by affinal relations to humans in Amazonian cosmologies. Human blood is jaguars’ manioc beer exactly as my sister is my brother-in-law’s wife – and for the same reasons. The many Amerindian myths which tell of interspecific marriages, elaborating on the difficult relations of human children- or siblings-in-law with their animal siblings or parents-in-law are doing nothing else other than combining the two analogies into a single one. Thus we can see how perspectivism has a close relation to exchange. It may not only be understood as a modality of exchange (the “reciprocity of perspectives” in our epigraph) but exchange itself needs to be defined in these terms – as an exchange of perspectives (Strathern 1988, 1992a, b).

With this we would then have an entirely relational ontology, in which individual substances or substantial forms are not the ultimate reality. Here there would be no distinction between primary and secondary qualities – to evoke a traditional philosophical contrast – or between ‘brute facts’ and ‘institutional facts’ – to evoke the duality advocated in a recent book by Searle (1995).

Let us talk a little about this book by Searle. In it, the author opposes what he calls brute facts or objects, whose reality is independent of consciousness – such as gravity, mountains, trees or animals (all natural kinds belong to this class) –, to facts and objects said to be institutional – whose existence, identity and purpose derive from specific cultural meanings attributed to them by humans – things such as marriage, money, axes or computers. Note that the book in question is

called *The construction of social reality* and not *The social construction of reality* which is a book by Berger and Luckmann. Brute facts are *not* constructed whereas institutional ones are (including statements about brute facts). In this overhauled version of the old nature/culture dualism, cultural relativism would be valid for cultural objects in the same way that natural universalism would be applicable to natural objects.

If by chance he came across my discussion of Amerindian perspectivism, Searle would probably say that what I am saying is that for Indians *all* facts are of the mental or institutional type and that all objects, even trees and fish, are like money or canoes in the sense that their only reality (as money or canoes, not as pieces of paper or wood) is due to the meanings and uses that humans attribute to them. This would be nothing other than relativism – an extreme, absolute form of relativism.

One of the implications of Amerindian animic-perspectival ontology is, indeed, that there are no autonomous, natural facts since the ‘nature’ of some is the ‘culture’ of others (see above). If the formula for a constitutive rule or for an institutional fact is “X counts as Y in context C” (Searle 1969:51-52) then the indigenous facts that interest us are really of this type: “Blood counts as manioc beer in the jaguar context”. But here these institutional facts (the ‘Y’ in Searle’s formula) are *universal*, something which escapes Searle’s alternative where brute facts are universal and institutional ones are particular. It is impossible to reduce perspectivism to a kind of constructionist relativism (which would define all facts as institutional and would conclude that they are culturally variable). What we have here is a case of *cultural universalism*, whose counterpart is *natural relativism* (I take the expression from Latour 1991:144), or, as I prefer to call it, multinaturalism.

Everyone can remember Wittgenstein’s saying: “if a lion could talk, we would not be able to understand him”. This is a relativist declaration. While for Indians, I would say, lions – in this case jaguars – are not only able to talk but we are perfectly capable of understanding what they are *saying*; what they *mean by what they say*, however, is another story. Same representations, different objects; single meaning, multiple references. The Indians’ problem is not a Fregean problem.

The savage body

The idea that the body appears to be the great differentiator in Amazonian cosmologies – that is, that which only unites beings of the same type, to the extent that it differentiates them from others – allows us to reconsider some of the classic questions of the ethnology of the region in a new light.

Thus the now already old theme of the importance of corporeality in Amazonian societies (Seeger, DaMatta & Viveiros de Castro 1979) gains a cosmological

basis. For example, it is possible to better understand why the categories of identity – be they individual, collective, ethnic or cosmological – are so frequently expressed using bodily idioms, in particular food practices and bodily decoration. The universal symbolic significance of alimentary and culinary regimes – from the mythic and Lévi-Straussian “raw and the cooked” to the Piro idea that their “real food” is what *makes* them, literally, different from white people (Gow 1991a); from the food avoidances that define “groups of substance” in central Brazil (Seeger 1980) to the basic classification of beings in terms of their eating habits (Baer 1994:88); from the conceptual productivity of commensality, similarity of diet and relative condition of prey-object and predator-subject (Vilaça 1992) to the omnipresence of cannibalism as the ‘predicative’ horizon of all relations with the other, be they matrimonial, alimentary or bellicose (Viveiros de Castro 1993). This universality demonstrates that the set of habits and processes that constitute bodies is precisely the location from which identity and difference emerge.

The same can be said of the intense semiotic use of the body in the definition of personal identity and in the circulation of social values (Turner 1995). The connection between this over-determination of the body (particularly its visible surface) and the restricted recourse in the Amazonian *socius* to objects capable of supporting relations – that is, a situation wherein social exchange is not mediated by material objectifications such as those characteristic of gift and commodity economies – has been shrewdly pinpointed by Turner, who has shown how the human body therefore must appear as the prototypical object. However, the Amerindian emphasis on the social construction of the body cannot be taken as the culturalisation of a natural substrate but rather as the production of a distinctly human body, meaning *naturally* human. Such a process seems to be expressing not so much a wish to ‘de-animalise’ the body through its cultural marking, but rather to *particularise a body that is still too generic*, differentiating it from the bodies of other human collectivities as well as from those of other species. The body, as the site of differentiating perspective, must be differentiated to the highest degree in order to completely express it.

The human body can be seen as the locus of the confrontation between humanity and animality, but not because it is essentially animal by nature and needs to be veiled and controlled by culture (Rivière 1994). The body is the subject’s fundamental expressive instrument and at the same time the object *par excellence*, that which is presented to the sight of the other. This is why the maximal social objectification of bodies, their maximal particularisation expressed in decoration and ritual exhibition is at the same time the moment of maximal animalisation (Goldman 1975:178; S. Hugh-Jones 1979:141-142; Seeger 1987:chap.1 and 2; Turner 1991; 1995), when bodies are covered by feathers, colours, designs, masks and other animal prostheses. Man ritually clothed as an animal is the counterpart to the animal supernaturally naked. The former, transformed into an animal, re-

veals to himself the 'natural' distinctiveness of his body; the latter, free of its exterior form and revealing itself as human, shows the 'supernatural' similarity of spirit. The model of spirit is the human spirit, but the model of body is the body of animals; and if from the point of view of the subject culture takes the generic form of 'I' and nature of 'it', then the objectification of the subject to itself demands a singularisation of bodies – which naturalises culture, i.e. embodies it – whilst the subjectification of the object implies communication at the level of spirit – which culturalises nature, i.e. supernaturalises it. Put in these terms, the Amerindian distinction of nature/culture, before it is dissolved in the name of a common animic human-animal sociality, must be re-read in the light of somatic perspectivism.

An important argument in favour of the idea that the model for the body is the animal body is the recognition that there is virtually no example in Amazonian ethnography or mythology of animals 'dressing themselves' as humans, that is, donning a human body as though it were clothing. All bodies, including the human body, are conceived of as clothing or envelopes; but we never see animals putting on the human costume. What we find are humans putting on animal clothing and turning into animals, or animals removing their animal clothing and revealing themselves to be humans. The human form is like a body inside a body, the primordial naked body – the 'soul' of the body.³⁶

It is important to note that these Amerindian bodies are not thought of as *given* but rather as *made*. Therefore, an emphasis on the methods of continuous fabrication of the body (Viveiros de Castro 1979); a notion of kinship as a process of active assimilation of individuals (Gow 1989; 1991) through the sharing of bodily substances, sexual and alimentary – and not as a passive inheritance of some substantial essence; the theory of memory which inscribes it in the "flesh" (Viveiros de Castro 1992a:201-7), and more generally the theory which situates knowledge in the body (McCallum 1996). The Amerindian *Bildung* happens to the body more than in the spirit: there is no spiritual change which is not bodily transformation, a redefinition of its affects and capacities.

The performative rather than given character of the body, a conception that requires it to differentiate itself 'culturally' in order for it to be 'naturally' different has an obvious connection with inter-specific metamorphosis, a possibility always suggested by Amerindian cosmologies. We need not be surprised by a way of thinking which posits bodies as the great differentiators yet at the same time states their transformability. Our cosmology supposes a singular distinctiveness of minds, but not even for this reason does it declare communication (albeit solipsism is a constant problem) to be impossible, or deny the mental/spiritual transformations induced by processes such as education and religious conversion; in truth, it is precisely because the spiritual is the locus of difference that conversion becomes necessary (the Europeans wanted to know whether In-

dians had souls in order to modify them). Bodily metamorphosis is the Amerindian counterpart to the European theme of spiritual conversion.

The relative rarity of unequivocal examples of spirit possession in the complex of Amerindian shamanism may, therefore, derive from the prevalence of the opposite theme of bodily metamorphosis. The problem of the religious conversion of indigenous people might also be illuminated from this angle. The indigenous experience of 'acculturation' seems to focus more on the incorporation and embodiment of western bodily practices – food, clothing, interethnic sex and language as a somatic capacity – rather than on an idea of spiritual assimilation.³⁷ Anthropological theories of socio-cultural change tend to reject western ethnogenetic ideas that mixing and racial assimilation lead to a loss of ethnic-cultural distinctiveness. Needless to say they do this with reason. Processes of acculturation are defined, on the contrary, in terms of ideological changes, that is as essentially mental processes that above all affect native 'beliefs'; acculturation is thought of through the imagery of religious conversion just as 'culture' is thought of through the imagery of religion. Consequently and despite concepts such as *habitus* introducing finer nuances to this tendency, the bodily changes involved in acculturation are conceived as effects of changes at the level of 'collective representations', rather than as their cause. I think Indians think differently if only because their 'thought' is differently associated with their 'body'.

Amerindian metamorphosis, let us be warned, is not a joyful or peaceful process, and much less a socially valued goal in the abstract. If solipsism is the phantom that continuously threatens our cosmology – raising the fear of not recognising ourselves in our 'own kind', because in truth they are not like us, given the potentially absolute singularity of minds – then the possibility of metamorphosis expresses the opposite fear, of no longer being able to differentiate between the human and the animal, and, in particular, the fear of seeing the human who lurks within the body of the animal one eats (Goldman 1975:183; Brightman 1993:206ff; Erikson 1997:223).³⁸ This translates into one of the most important ethnographic recurrences of perspectivism: the past humanity of animals is added to their current spirituality concealed by their visible form to produce a widespread complex of food restrictions or precautions which sometimes declares certain animals that were mythically consubstantial with humans to be inedible, and sometimes demands the shamanic desubjectification of an animal before it is eaten, thus neutralising its spirit, transubstantiating its flesh into vegetal form or reducing it semantically to other animals that are less close to humans – all this under threat of retaliation in the form of illness, conceived as cannibal counterpredation, carried out by the spirit of the prey, who turns predator in a mortal inversion of perspectives that transforms the human into an animal.³⁹ The phantom of cannibalism is the Amerindian equivalent to the problem of solipsism: if the latter derives from the uncertainty as to whether the natural similarity of bodies guarantees a real community of spirit, then the former suspects that the similarity of

souls might prevail over the real differences of body and that all animals that are eaten might, despite the shamanistic efforts to de-subjectivise them, remain human. This, of course, does not prevent us having amongst ourselves more or less radical solipsists, nor that various Amerindian societies be purposefully and more or less literally cannibalistic.

In Amazonian cannibalism, what is intended is precisely the incorporation of the subject-aspect of the enemy, who to this end is hyper-subjectivised, not its desubjectivisation as is the case with animal bodies (see Viveiros de Castro 1992a and Fausto 2001). As I have said, a good part of a shaman's work consists of transforming dead animals into purely natural corpses, de-spiritualised and thus available to be eaten without risks. By contrast, spirits are defined, among other things, by the fact that they are supremely inedible; this turns them into eaters par excellence, or in other words, into anthropophagi a. This is why it is common that the big predators are the preferred form in which spirits manifest themselves. It can further be understood why game animals see humans as spirits, why predators see us as game animals, and why animals considered inedible are frequently likened to spirits.

The notion of metamorphosis is directly linked to the doctrine of animal clothing to which I have variously referred. How are we to reconcile the idea that the body is the site of differentiating perspectives with the theme of the *appearance* and *essence* which is always evoked to interpret animism and perspectivism? Here seems to me to lie an important mistake, which is that of taking bodily 'appearance' as inert and false, whereas spiritual 'essence' would be active and real (see the definitive observations by Goldman 1975:63, 124-25, 200). I argue that nothing could be further from the Indians' minds when they speak of bodies in terms of 'clothing'. *It is not so much that the body is a kind of clothing but rather that clothing is a kind of body.* Let us not forget that we are dealing with societies which inscribe efficacious meanings onto the skin, and which use animal masks (or at least know their principle) endowed with the power metaphysically to transform the identities of those who wear them, if used in the appropriate ritual context. To put on mask-clothing is not so much to conceal a human essence beneath an animal appearance, but rather to activate the powers of a different body.⁴⁰ The animal clothes that shamans use to travel the cosmos are not fantasies but instruments: they are akin to diving equipment, or space suits, and not to carnival masks. The intention when donning a wet suit is to be able to function like a fish, to breathe underwater, not to conceal oneself under a strange covering. In the same way, the clothing which, amongst animals, covers an internal 'essence' of a human type, is not a mere disguise but their distinctive equipment, endowed with the affects and capacities which define each animal.⁴¹ It is true that "appearances can be deceptive" (Hallowell 1960; Rivière 1994); but my impression is that in Amerindian narratives which take as a theme animal clothing, the interest is as much or more in what these clothes do than what they hide.⁴² Besides this, be-

tween a being and its appearance is its body, which is more than just that – and the very same narratives relate how appearances are always ‘unmasked’ by bodily behaviour which is inconsistent with them.⁴³ In short: there is no doubt that bodies are discardable and exchangeable and that ‘behind’ them lie subjectivities which are formally identical to humans. But this idea is not similar to our opposition between appearance and essence; it merely manifests the objective permeability of bodies which is based in the subjective equivalence of minds.

Another classic theme in South American ethnology which could be interpreted within this framework is that of the sociological discontinuity between the living and the dead (Carneiro da Cunha 1978). The fundamental distinction between the living and the dead is made by the body and precisely not by the spirit; death is a bodily catastrophe which prevails as differentiator over the common ‘animation’ of the living and the dead. Amerindian cosmologies dedicate equal or greater interest to the way in which the dead see the world as they do to the vision of animals and as is the case for the latter, they underline the radical differences *vis-à-vis* the world of the living. To be precise, being definitively separated from their bodies, the dead are not human. As spirits defined by their disjunction from a human body, the dead are logically attracted to the bodies of animals; this is why to die is to transform into an animal,⁴⁴ as it is to transform into other figures of bodily alterity such as affines and enemies. In this manner, if animism affirms a subjective and social continuity between humans and animals, its somatic complement, perspectivism, establishes an objective discontinuity, equally social, between live humans and dead humans. (Religions based on the cult of the ancestors postulate the inverse: spiritual identity goes beyond the bodily barrier of death, the living and the dead are similar in so far as they manifest the same spirit – we would thus have superhuman ancestrality and spiritual possession on one side, animalisation of the dead and bodily metamorphosis on the other.)

Having examined the differentiating component of Amerindian perspectivism, it remains for me to attribute a cosmological ‘function’ to the trans-specific unity of the spirit. This is the point at which, I believe, a relational definition could be given of a category, Supernature, which nowadays has fallen into disrepute but whose pertinence seems to me to be unquestionable.⁴⁵ Apart from its use in labelling the cosmographic domains of a ‘hyper-uranian’ type, or in defining a third type of intentional beings occurring in indigenous cosmologies, which are neither human nor animal (I am referring to ‘spirits’), the notion of supernature may serve to designate a specific relational context and particular phenomenological quality, which is as distinct from the intersubjective relations that define the social world as from the ‘inter-objective’ relations with the bodies of animals.

Following the analogy with the pronominal set (Benveniste 1966a, b) we can see that between the reflexive *I* of culture (the generator of the concepts of soul or

spirit) and the impersonal *it* of nature (definer of the relation with corporeal alterity), there is a position missing, the *you*, the *second person*, or the other taken as other subject, whose point of view is the latent echo of that of the *I*. I believe that this concept can aid in determining the supernatural context. An abnormal context wherein a subject is captured by another cosmologically dominant point of view, wherein he is the *you* of a non-human perspective, *Supernature is the form of the Other as Subject*, implying an objectification of the human *I* as a *you* for this Other.

The typical supernatural situation in an Amerindian world is the meeting in the forest between a man – always on his own – and a being which is seen at first merely as an animal or a person, then reveals itself as a spirit or a dead person and speaks to the man (the dynamics of this communication are excellently analysed by Taylor [1993b]).⁴⁶ These encounters tend to be lethal for the interlocutor who, overpowered by the non-human subjectivity, passes over to its side, transforming himself into a being of the same species as the speaker: dead, spirit or animal. He who responds to a *you* spoken by a non-human accepts the condition of being its ‘second person’, and when assuming in his turn the position of *I* does so already as a non-human. (Only shamans, multinatural beings by definition and office, are capable of shifting between various perspectives, calling and being called ‘you’ by the animal subjectivities and spirits without losing their own condition as subjects.) The canonical form of these supernatural encounters, then, consists in suddenly finding out that the other is ‘human’, that is, that *it* is the human, which automatically dehumanises and alienates the interlocutor and transforms him into a prey object, that is, an animal. And this finally may be the true meaning of the Amerindian concern with what is hidden behind appearances. Appearances can be misleading because you can never be certain which is the dominant point of view, that is, which world is in operation when you interact with someone else. Everything is dangerous; above all when all may be people, and we might not be.

Final note

It is important to draw attention to the fact that the two cosmological points of view that have been contrasted with one another here – what I called ‘western’ and what I called ‘Amerindian’ – are from *our* point of view, incompatible. A compass needs to have one leg fixed so that the other may revolve around it. We have chosen the leg corresponding to nature as our support, leaving the other to describe the circle of cultural diversity. The Indians appear to have chosen that leg of the cosmic compass that corresponds to what we call ‘culture’, thus submitting our ‘nature’ to continuous inflexion and variation. The idea of a compass

capable of moving both legs at the same time – a finalised relativism – would thus be geometrically contradictory, or philosophically unstable.

But we must not forget, above all, that if the points of the compass are separated, the shafts meet at the apex: the distinction between nature and culture revolves around a point where this distinction does not yet exist. This point, as Latour (1991) argued so well, tends to manifest itself in our modernity only as extra-theoretical practice, given that Theory is the work of purification and separation of the “middle world” of practice into opposing domains, substances or principles: into Nature and Culture, for example. Amerindian thought – perhaps all mythopœic thought – takes the opposite path. For the object of mythology is situated precisely at the apex, where the separation of Nature and Culture is still a pure virtuality. At this virtual origin of all perspectives, absolute movement and infinite multiplicity are indistinguishable from congealed immobility and unnameable unity.

Secondly and finally: if the Indians are right, then the difference between two points of view is *not* a cultural question, and much less one of ‘mentality’. If the contrasts between relativism and perspectivism or between multiculturalism and multinaturalism are read in the light not of our multicultural relativism but of indigenous doctrine, it is necessary to conclude that the reciprocity of perspectives applies to itself and that the difference lies in worlds, not in thinking:

We may be able to show that the same logical processes operate in myth as in science, and that man has always been thinking equally well. Progress – if this term is then applicable – would however not have consciousness as its theatre but the world, where humanity, endowed with constant faculties would encounter new objects, throughout its long history (Lévi-Strauss 1955b:255).

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Notes

- 1 The following pages were born out of a dialogue with Tânia Stolze Lima. A first version of the main article upon which this present piece is based (Viveiros de Castro 1996c; see Viveiros de Castro 1998 for the English version) was written and published at the same time as Stolze Lima's study on Juruna perspectivism to which I refer the reader (Lima 1996). Latour's essay (1991) on the notion of modernity was an indirect but decisive source of inspiration for that first version. Some months after seeing the 1996 article in print, I read an old text by Fritz Krause (1931; cited in Boelscher 1989:212 n.10) where I found some ideas that are curiously similar to the ones developed here; they are to be discussed on another occasion. The real convergence which I ignored in the article of 1996, though, is with the theory developed by Roy Wagner in *The invention of culture*, a book I had read some 15 years previously (in 1981, when the 2nd edition was published) but had completely erased from my memory undoubtedly because it was beyond my comprehension

at the time. Upon re-reading the book in 1998 I noticed that I had after all taken in something given that I had re-invented certain crucial passages from Wagner's argument. As always, Peter Gow, Aparecida Vilaça, Philippe Descola and Michael Houseman contributed with suggestions and comments at various stages in the writing of this piece. Finally, the ongoing development of the arguments aired here (2005) owe much more to the insights of Bruno Latour and Marilyn Strathern than I can at present express.

- 2 "This is the logic of a discourse, commonly known as 'Western', whose ontological foundation is a separation between subjective and objective domains, the first an inner world of mind and meaning, the second an outer world of matter and substance" (Ingold 1991:356)
- 3 When they are together in their villages in the forest, for example, the animals dispense with their clothes and assume their human shape. In other cases, the clothing appears transparent to the eyes of the particular species and to human shamans.
- 4 The notion of bodily 'clothing' has been recorded among others, for the Makuna (Århem 1993), the Yagua (Chaumeil 1983:125-27), the Piro (Gow pers. comm.), the Trio (Rivière 1994), or the peoples of the Upper Xingú (Gregor 1977; Viveiros de Castro 1977:182). The idea is probably pan-American, being of great significance, for example, in Kwakiutl cosmology (Goldman 1975:62-63, 124-25; 182-86, 227-28).
- 5 For some examples see Baer 1994:102, 119-224 (Machiguenga); Grenand 1980: 42 (Wayãpi); Jara 1996: 68-73 (Akuriyó); Osborn 1990:151 (U'wa); Viveiros de Castro 1992a: 68 (Araweté); Weiss 1969: 158 (Campa).
- 6 For examples see Saladin d'Anglure 1990, Fienup-Riordan 1994 (Eskimo); Nelson 1983, McDonnell 1984 (Koyukon, Kaska); Tanner 1979, Scott 1989, Brightman 1993 (Cree); Hallowell 1960 (Ojibwa); Goldman 1975 (Kwakiutl); Guédon 1984 (Tsimshian); Boelscher 1989 (Haida). For Siberia, see Hamayon 1990. Finally, see Howell 1984, 1996 and Karim 1981 for the Chewon and Ma'Betisék of Malaysia. The study by Howell 1984 was one of the first to devote significant attention to the issue. Similar ideas have also been recorded in relation to one Melanesian cosmology, namely the Kaluli (Schiefflin 1976: chap. 5).
- 7 The notions of perspective and point of view play a decisive role in articles I have written previously, but the focus there was principally on the intra-human dynamic, particularly Tupi cannibalism and the concept was almost always of analytical and abstract value (Viveiros de Castro 1992a:248-51, 256-59; 1996a. The studies by Vilaça and especially by Lima showed me that it was possible to generalise these notions.
- 8 See Renard-Casevitz 1991:10-11, 29-31; Vilaça 1992:49-51; Århem 1993:11-12; Howell 1996:113.
- 9 Overing 1985:249f; 1986:245-46; Viveiros de Castro 1992a:73-74; Baer 1994:89.
- 10 The notion that the distinguishing subject is the historically stable term of the distinction between 'self' (humans, Indians, my group) and 'other' (animals, white people, other Indians) appears both in the case of inter-species differentiation as well as in intra-specific separations, as can be seen in the various Amerindian origin myths about white people (see e.g. DaMatta 1970, 1973; S. Hugh-Jones 1988; Lévi-Strauss 1991; see also Viveiros de Castro 2000). Others once were what we are now, and they are not, as is the case for us, what we once were. It is here that we may perceive just how pertinent the notion of "cold societies" is: history does exist, but it is something that only happens to others or because of others.
- 11 The distinction is analogous to Wagner's (1981:133) or Ingold's (1994), between humanity as a species (or *humankind*) and as a moral ideal (or *humanity*).
- 12 The relationship between shamanism and hunting is a classic question. See Chaumeil 1983:231-32 and Crocker 1985:17-25.
- 13 The importance of the hunter-shaman relationship with the animal world in societies whose economies are based more on horticulture and fishing rather than hunting, raises interesting questions for the cultural history of Amazonia (Viveiros de Castro 1996b).
- 14 See Erikson 1984:110-12; Descola 1986:317-30; Århem 1996. However, we note that in western Amazonian cultures, particularly those that make use of hallucinogens, the personification of plants appears to be at least as significant as the personification of animals. Also in some areas, such as the upper Xingu, the spiritualization of artefacts plays an important cosmological role.

- 15 I note that this way of expressing the contrast is not merely similar to the famous opposition between 'gift' and 'commodity'. I understand it to be the same contrast formulated here in non-economist terms: "if in a commodity economy things and persons assume the social form of things, then in a gift economy they assume the social form of persons (Strathern 1988:134; cf. Gregory 1982:41).
- 16 The anthropological and theoretical definition of 'art' involving the process of abduction of agency is masterfully described by Alfred Gell in *Art and agency* (1998).
- 17 Here I am referring to Dennett's concept of the *n*-ordinality of intentional systems. An intentional system of the second order is one where the observer does not attribute beliefs, desires and other intentions merely to the object (first order) but also beliefs etc. *about* other beliefs etc. The most widely accepted cognitivist view maintains that it is only *Homo sapiens* who exhibits intentionality of the second order or more. It may be noted that my shamanic principle of 'abducting a maximum of agency' clearly goes against the dogmas of physicalist psychology: "Psychologists have often appealed to a principle known as Lloyd Morgan's Canon of Parsimony, which can be viewed as a special case of Occam's Razor; it is the principle that one should attribute to an organism as little intelligence or consciousness or rationality or mind as will suffice to account for its behaviour" (Dennett 1978:274). In effect, the shaman's rattle is an instrument which differs entirely from Occam's Razor; the latter may be useful for writing articles on logic but it is not very good, for example, for retrieving lost souls.
- 18 As Marilyn Strathern observes with regard to an epistemological regime similar to the Amerindian one: "[This] convention requires that the objects of interpretation – human or not – become understood as other persons; indeed, the very act of interpretation presupposes the personhood of what is being interpreted. [...] What one thus encounters in making interpretations are always counter-interpretations..." (1999:239).
- 19 Wagner (1981) was one of the few who did.
- 20 Staying within the Americanist orbit, one might among other works call to mind, Overing's (1985) rejection of the privilege of metaphor in favour of a relativist literalism which appears to rely on a notion of belief. Also the theory of dialectical synecdoche as prior and superior to metaphoric analogy proposed by Turner (1991b), an author who like other specialists (Seeger 1981; Crocker 1985) has sought to contest interpretations of the nature/culture dualism of Gê and Bororo people in terms of a static, privative and discrete opposition; the concept of "dual triadic dualism" or "dynamic dualism" of Peter Roe (1990) which the author holds to be a distinctive feature of Amazonian art and thought and which was undoubtedly inspired by Lévi-Strauss; and my re-analysis (Viveiros de Castro 1992a) of the contrast between totemism and sacrifice in light of the Deleuzian concept of becoming which tries to take account of the centrality of processes of ontological predation in Tupi cosmologies as well as the directly social (and not merely reflective classificatory) nature of the interaction of human and extra-human orders.
- 21 For a joint discussion of the pairings of totemism/sacrifice and *aroe/bope*, see Viveiros de Castro 1991:88, 91 n.11.
- 22 I say these structures are asymmetrical because, in the case of naturalism, for example, the notion of nature does not require the notion of culture in order to be defined, but this is not true vice-versa. In other words, in our ontology the nature/society interface is natural because the distinction itself is seen as 'cultural', i.e. *constructed* and thus *subordinated* (see Searle 1995:227: "There cannot be an opposition between culture and biology, because if there were, biology would always win"). By contrast, in Amerindian cosmologies said interface is social because the distinction is seen to be 'natural', i.e. *given*. Here it is the category of nature which requires a prior definition of culture. (For a contrast between the 'given' and the 'innate', see Wagner 1981.
- 23 See Strathern 1980 and Latour 1991 for this instability; a good popular discussion of the tension between monism and dualism in modern consciousness can be found in Malik 2000.
- 24 See Radcliffe-Brown 1929:130-31 where among other noteworthy arguments, he distinguishes *processes of personification* of species and natural phenomena (which "permit nature to be thought of as if it were a society of persons, and so makes of it a social or moral order"), such as can be found among Eskimo and Andaman Islanders, and *systems of classification* of natural species like

- those to be found in Australia, which configure a "system of social solidarities" between man and nature. This is strongly evocative of Descola's animism/totemism distinction as well as the *ma-nido/totem* contrast explored by Lévi-Strauss.
- 25 I think that Ingold's argument exposes cogently the weaknesses of the constructionist approach, but is ultimately unsatisfactory in its propositive side, which I do not discuss here (see Viveiros de Castro 2005).
 - 26 Note that the 16th Century question is the theological version of the so-called "problem of other minds", which has pre-occupied philosophers since the very beginnings of modernity.
 - 27 The same Lévi-Strauss illustrates this about-turn in a splendid paragraph in his homage to Rousseau: "We started by cutting man off from nature and establishing him in an absolute reign. We believed ourselves to have thus erased his most unassailable characteristic: that he is first a living being. Remaining blind to this common property, we gave free rein to all excesses. Never better than after the last four centuries of his history could a Western man understand that, while assuming the right to impose a radical separation of humanity and animality, while granting to one all that he denied the other, he initiated a vicious circle. The one boundary, constantly pushed back, would be used to separate men from other men and to claim – to the profit of ever smaller minorities – the privilege of a humanism, corrupted at birth by taking self-interest as its principle and its notion" (1962c:41).
 - 28 A variation on this refusal to onomastically self-objectify can be found in those cases or moments where, a collective entity in the position of subject taking itself to be part of a plurality of analogous collectives, the self-referential term means '*the others*', being used primarily to identify those collectives from which the subject excludes itself. The alternative to pronominal subjectivation is an equally relational self-objectification, where 'I' can only mean 'the other's other': see the *achuar* of the Achuar, or the *nawva* of the Pano (Taylor 1985:168; Erikson 1990:80-84). The logic of Amerindian auto-ethnonyms calls for a specific study. For other illustrative cases see: Vilaça 1992: 49-51; Price 1987; Viveiros de Castro 1992a:64-65. For an illuminating analysis of a North American case that is similar to the Amazonian ones, see McDonnell 1984:41-43.
 - 29 Thus, Taylor writes about the Jivaroan concept of *wakan*, 'soul': "Essentially *wakan* is self-consciousness [...] a representation of reflexivity [...]. *Wakan* is thus common to many entities, and is by no means an exclusively human attribute: there are as many *wakan* as there are things that may, contextually, be endowed with reflexivity" (1993b:660).
 - 30 "Such is the foundation of perspectivism. It does not express a dependency on a predefined subject; on the contrary, whatever accedes to the point of view will be subject..." (Deleuze 1988:27). Saussure's formula (from the purest Kantian lineage), can be found right at the beginning of *Cours* (1916:23).
 - 31 See e.g. Brown, on the Aguaruna concepts of *wakan*, human soul and *aents*, 'person' or soul of non-human entities. The author considers these to be fundamentally similar, defining both as "*an enduring, hidden essence that when made visible has the form and characteristics of a human being*" (1986: 4-55).
 - 32 In the same spirit as Århem, Signe Howell argues that "the Chewong are relativists; for them each species is different, but equal" (1996:133). This is also true; but it would probably be more true if we inverted the emphasis: each species is equal (in the sense that there is no absolute point of view, independent of all 'specificity'), but different (for such equality does not mean that a given type of being can indiscriminately assume the point of view of other species).
 - 33 "The point of view is located in the body, says Leibniz..." (Deleuze 1988:16).
 - 34 For us, the human species and the human condition necessarily coincide, but the former holds ontological primacy; this is why, to deny the human condition to somebody else, sooner or later results in a denial of their co-specificity. In the indigenous case it is the condition which takes primacy over the species and the latter is attributed to any being which claims to partake of the former.
 - 35 The proof *au contraire* of the singularity of the spirit in our cosmologies lies in the fact that when we try to universalise it, there is no other option – now that the supernatural is out of bounds –

- than to identify it with the structure and function of the brain. The spirit can only be universal (natural) if it is (in) the body.
- 36 Also note that when the famous double masks of the northwest coast of North America have one human and one animal face, they invariably have the former as the interior hidden face.
 - 37 See recent developments of this argument in Vilaça 1999.
 - 38 "The greatest danger in life lies in the fact that the food of man consists virtually entirely of souls" (Birket-Smith quoting an Eskimo shaman, in Bodenhorn 1988: 1).
 - 39 See Viveiros de Castro 1978; Crocker 1985; Overing 1985;1986; Vilaça 1992; Århem 1993; S. Hugh-Jones 1996, among many others.
 - 40 Peter Gow (pers. comm.) tells me that the Piro conceive of the act of putting on clothing as an animating of clothing. The emphasis is less, as among ourselves, on the fact of covering the body, but rather on the gesture of filling the clothing, of activating it. In other words, donning clothing modifies the clothing more than the body of the person wearing it. Goldman (op. cit.:183) observes that Kwakiutl masks "get excited" during the great Winter festival; and Kensinger (1995:255) remembers that for the Cashinahua, bird feathers (used as bodily adornments) pertain to the category of 'remedies'.
 - 41 "'Clothing" in this sense does not mean merely a body covering but also refers to the skill and ability to carry out certain tasks' (Rivière in Koelewijn 1987:306).
 - 42 Rivière discusses an interesting myth in which it is clear that the clothing is not so much form as it is function. A father-in-law jaguar offers his human son-in-law jaguar clothes. The myth goes: "Jaguar had different sizes of clothes. Clothes to catch tapir, clothing to catch peccary [...] clothing to get agouti. All these clothes were more or less different and they all had claws." Now, jaguars do not change size to hunt prey of varying sizes, they merely modify their behaviour. These clothes in the myth are adapted to their specific functions and of the jaguar-form all that remains are the claws, instruments of its function, because the claws are all that matter.
 - 43 As Fienup-Riordan (1994: 50) notes regarding Eskimo myths of animal transformation: "The hosts invariably betray their animal identity by some peculiar trait during the visit..."
 - 44 Examples: Schwartzman 1988: 268 (Pinará); Vilaça 1992:247-55 (Wari'); Turner 1995:152 (Kayapó); Pollock 1985b:95 (Kulina); Gray 1996:157-78 (Arakmbut); Alexiades 1999:134, 178 (Ese Eja); Weiss 1972:169 (Campa).
 - 45 The notion has been discredited at least since Durkheim. The argument against it goes more or less like this: since 'primitives' do not possess a concept of natural necessity, i.e. of Nature as a domain ruled by the laws of physics, there is no sense in talking of Supernature since there is no super-physical domain of causality. Maybe so. But many who object to this concept continue to use the notion of nature to designate one domain of indigenous cosmologies and do not see any problems with the Nature/Culture opposition, be it as a supposedly 'emic' distinction or be it as an 'etic' ontological divider. As I pointed out earlier, many of the traditional functions of theological Supernature have been absorbed by the modern concept of Culture. Finally, if the Nature/Culture opposition can be seen as being of "above all methodological value", why would the notion of Supernature not also have the right to the same *habeas corpus*?
 - 46 Consider what the Achuar studied by Taylor recommend as a method of protection in the event of encountering an *iwianch*, a phantom or spirit in the forest. You must tell the *iwianch*: "I am a person too!..." That is, one must affirm one's own point of view; when the human says that he is a person too, what he is saying is that he is the *I*, not the other: the real person here is me.

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